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BEFORE THE

LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 13, 1908.

"History herself, as seen in her own workshop."

EARLY CONESTOGA NAVIGATION.

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER MEETING.

VOL. XII. NO. 9.

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Early Conestoga Navigation

The first effort to make the Conestoga river an avenue of trade and commerce was the Act of March 9, 1771 (p. 627, Vol. 1, of Bioren laws), making that river (as well as some of the upper streams of Pennsylvania) a public highway as far as Matthias Slough's mill dam, for the purposes of navigation. It provided that all obstructions to His Majesty's subjects and their commerce up and down the said Conestoga river shall be held to be common nuisances. In Section 11 the Act appoints a commission to clear the stream and make it navigable. George Ross and others were empowered to collect money for the purpose, and they were also a committee to make dams for the same object. The act further provided that no person should lead any water away from the stream, by race or otherwise.

Early Steps at Navigation.

The next step in this general purpose is the Act of March 17, 1806 (P. L., p. 463), which gave the Governor the power to incorporate a company to make the Conestoga river navigable from the Susquehanna river to Hamilton's mill, with locks and dams. Section 8 of this Act provides that the company may enter on the lands along the Conestoga after giving notice to owners and paying damages; and that three appraisers may be appointed to appraise damages or agree with the owners as to the damages. And section 10 pro-

vides that in any dam erected by the company it shall be lawful for the owners of the adjoining land to erect water works and have the privilege of conveying water out of the dams so that he does not injure the navigation; but that he shall pay for such privilege. Section 19 provides that if the company does not begin the work within three years and complete it inside of ten they shall lose their rights.

Then came the Act of March 28, 1820 (P. L., p. 150), which, among other things, empowered James Hopkins,and his heirs and assigns, to create and construct a Slackwater navigation in the Conestoga creek, or river, from the Susquehanna river to the Lancaster and Philadelphia turnpike road. Section 2 empowered them to erect dams or locks; section 3 to make estimates on damages by views; section 5, that persons injured by the rising of the water should receive compensation; and section 10, that the locks should be 18 feet wide and 80 feet long; and the horn to announce the approach of the boats should be blown at least one-fourth of a mile away from the locks.

Adam Reigart in Early Movement.

The next step was the Act of March 3, 1825 (P. L., p. 46), which provided for the erection of the Conestoga Navigation Company and the construction of its plant. It sets forth that Adam Reigart and the other gentlemen therein named should have the power to take necessary steps, and that it would be lawful for them to make a navigation canal or slackwater navigation and tow path on and along the Conestoga river; and to set up locks and dams fit for navigation;

to occupy lands on which to make sluices and to erect canals,dam-locks, etc., first satisfying the owners; provided for three suitable viewers in case parties can not agree; and that if any person is injured and damages are occasioned by the erecting of dams or the undulated by swelling water, or any mill or water work injured or tail race clogged, that they shall be entitled to damages. The Act further provides a penalty for not keeping the dams in repair, and that the company may sell surplus water or rent it for works.

The next step was the Act of April 9, 1827 (P. L., p. 174), which gave the Conestoga Navigation Company rights which it did not theretofore possess, viz., that of purchasing lands and mills and water works which might be injured by swelling water on them; and in such mills to raise and erect such machinery as they think fit. And section 3 provides that if they deem it expedient or advantageous to purchase any mills or other works on the streams which are tributary to the Conestoga river they may do so, and raise the dams on such streams to such height as they think proper, so that the water power may not be lost; and that injury to individuals shall be paid for.

Then followed the Act of December 20, 1827 (P. L., p. 2), empowering the Conestoga Navigation Co. to borrow money from banks and to mortgage their works and improvements.

An Inspector of Liquors.

This was followed by the Act of April 8, 1829 (P. L., p. 129), which provided for the inspection of liquors and wood which might be shipped to the landing place of the Conestoga Navigation Company, near the city of

Lancaster. And on the same day and in the same book, p. 136, there was another Act fixing a new method by which to pay for the lands taken by the company, and providing an appeal to the District or Circuit Court of Lancaster county in such case.

Then followed up the Act of April 29, 1829 (P. L., p. 367), which further gave to the District and Circuit Courts of Lancaster county the power to hear grievances arising out of damages, and to fix these damages.

Financial Difficulties.

Under these various Acts of Assembly the Conestoga Navigation was erected and started in its business. About this time came along the hard luck and the great damages to the company by reason of floods, which is found in Vol. 10 of Hazard's Register (p. 54). These losses to the company conspired to bring about a Sheriff sale, when the whole property of the Conestoga Navigation Company was sold by Sheriff Adam Bear to William and Edward Coleman, for $17,500. The proceedings are found in Book Y, Vol. 5, p. 298, of the Recorder's office. The property is said in the proceedings to consist of a stone grist mill in Conestoga township and 57 acres and 34 perches of land on the south side of Conestoga creek, with certain reservations; and the sale was upon a $5,000 judgment recovered by the Farmers' Bank, of Lancaster.

In addition to the property just spoken of there was included in the deed all the dams, locks, sluices, roads, paths, towpaths, water and water works thereunto belonging and all the houses,mills, lands, tenements and hereditaments and real estate of and belonging to the said Conestoga Navi-

gation Company lying on both sides of Conestoga river in Lampeter, Conestoga, Lancaster and Manor townships; and all the tolls, incomes, rents, issues, profits, rights, liberties, privileges, franchises, hereditaments whatsoever belonging thereto, being the estate of the Conestoga Navigation Company.

The Sheriff's deed recites that on June 1 he exposed it to public sale and sold it to William and Edward Coleman for $17,500, and that part of the premises to wit, the grist mill at lock No. 1, was subject to a mortgage of $1,000, held by the Bank of Pennsylvania. The deed is dated June 10, 1833.

The Colemans Interested.

The next step was for William Coleman to sell out his half-interest to his brother, Edward Coleman, which occurred very shortly after the two had bought the same, and the deed is on record in the Recorder's office of Lancaster county. After Edward Coleman thus owned all of the lands and rights of the Navigation Company, he made a great many improvements on it, repairing the dams that had been broken and bought tracts of land for towpaths and flowage rights, inasmuch as he raised one of the dam, notably the one at Slackwater, to a height of twenty feet and three inches. These properties were bought from David Thomas (found in Book K, Vol. 6, p. 240); from Jacob Warfel (K-6-264); from Jacob Brenneman (N-6-142); from Henry Shenk (N-6-144); from Abram Brenneman (N-6-155; from Henry Rohrer (P-6-91); and from Adam Lefevre (T-6-159). The Thomas, Shenk, Brenneman and Lefevre purchases were in Manor township, and the Warfel, Brenneman

and Rohrer purchases in Conestoga township. The purchase from Abram Brenneman recites that the right is purchased to swell and dam the water back as high as will be on a level with the ground marked by the posts in the ground, and so far as a dam to be erected on the site of the present dam (Slackwater), and to be of the height of twenty feet and three inches, will swell or dam the water back to the same height as the dam which is mentioned in the Henry Shenk purchase. Next after Edward Coleman became the owner of these properties and rights of the Conestoga Navigation Companies and bought the various properties just referred to, he succeeded in having a new company chartered by the Legislature, to which afterwards he sold his holdings. This new company was known as the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company. It was chartered by the Legislature April 1, 1837 and may be found in P. L., p.152, of that year. The Act recites the old Act of March 3, 1825, and that works were completed and built under the old Act and that through losses and misfortunes the company failed; and it was then sold out by the Sheriff and has since become the property of Edward Coleman, who has now the right to receive tolls, etc., and has bought additional property. It also sets forth that he has now improved the works and spent $120,000 on them, and that $50,000 more will be needed to make repairs and improvements. It further sets forth that a petition was signed by citizens of Lancaster, stating that the present owner is willing to transfer his holdings to a new company, if such company is formed. The Act then sets forth in Section 13 that Edward Coleman,George Louis Mayer,

Peter Long, Abram Peters and Jacob Huber, of Lancaster, and their associates, shall be a corporation, etc., known as the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company. Section 14 provides that the corporation may purchase from Edward Coleman the appurtenances and properties of the old Conestoga Navigation Company. And, finally, Section 21 sets forth that Edward Coleman, his heirs or assigns, until he or they make a conveyance, and after the conveyance, that the company taking the same "shall hold, possess and enjoy all the lands, tenements, hereditaments, works and other properties and tolls, and all else in the deed of the Sheriff described, and all the rights, privileges and franchises of whatever nature and kind, and all the waters and streams which the Conestoga Navigation Company had or were entitled to under the Act of March 3, 1825, and its supplements."

Coleman Unloads Holdings.

This corporation being duly erected and organized, Edward Coleman now proceeded to unload to it his holdings, which he did for the price of $200,000 by a deed dated May 6, 1840, found in the Recorder's office in Book S, Vol. 6, p. 299. This deed, by Edward Coleman to the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company recites the proceedings in full, and among other things states that William Coleman granted and conveyed his rights in the premises to his brother Edward; and it is set forth that the whole system consists of nine locks and dams, and excepts a few reservations at lock No. 1 and lock No. 3, known as the Crise mill, and at lock No. 6. It is signed by Edward Coleman and Anna C. Coleman, his wife.

The new company now having possession of the property bought additional rights and lands for the purpose of towpaths, etc., and for the flooding of lands, which was necessary by reason of the high dams. These premises were bought by the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company from David Yardy (Book R, Vol. 6, p. 258); from Jacob Shenk (R-6-192); from John Shenk (S-6-24); from The Susquehanna Canal Company (T-6-259); from Emanuel Herr (Y-6-32 and Y-6-33); from Jacob Huber (Y-6-34); from Christian Herr (Y-6-35); from David Bair et al. (E-7-359); from Isaac Hazelhurst (H-7-7), and from Abram Peters (D-8-156). These purchases were all of lands in Conestoga and Manor townships, except The Susquehanna Canal Company purchase, which was on the Susquehanna river. They were practically all used for towpaths.

More Financial Disturbances.

The company now carried on its business for twenty years, when new troubles beset it. It again became heavily indebted and suffered continually from freshets tearing out its dams; and the result was that on the 16th of April, 1866, Fred. Smith, the High Sheriff of Lancaster county, again found the whole system in his hands for sale on execution. The deed is recorded in the Recorder's office in Book A, Vol. 10, p. 296, and it recites that by virtue of the writ the Sheriff levied on all and singular the lands, tenements, hereditaments, works, water-powers and other property of the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company and all its rights. It states that it consists of the "Slackwater navigation on the Conestoga creek, extending from

the City of Lancaster to the mouth of the Conestoga at Safe Harbor, 17¾ miles, connecting it with the Susquehanna Canal, with seven locks and dams and one grand lock, and six lock houses; and the land attached thereunto with the canal, towpaths, bridges, ways, franchises and appurtenances thereto belonging. Execution was issued for the payment of a debt of $25,612, which Isaac Hazelhurst, trustee for bondholders to the use of the Farmers' National Bank, recovered against the said Navigation Company."

Pursuant to the above execution, the Sheriff sold the above property for the sum of $10,000 to Samuel J. Reeves.

Samuel J. Reeves Becomes Owner.

Samuel J. Reeves,it seems,operated it for some time, and sold out different portions of it from time to time. One of the principal sales was by Samuel J. Reeves to Jacob G. Peters and George Levan, on November 7, 1872, the deed for which appears in the Recorder's office in Book F, Vol. 12, p. 537, and it recites that the grantors sold "so much of the lands, tenements, hereditaments, water and water powers which were of the Lancaster, Susquehanna and Slackwater Navigation Company,as are included between the head of the navigation at Lancaster and a point 200 yards below and south from what is known as the outlet for lock No. 4 of the said navigation, at the southern end of the canal at Petersville,in Conestoga township" being a part of the same which Fred. Smith, Sheriff, sold to the said Samuel J. Reeves." This, as we understand, is for the upper half of the canal system, extending from Slackwater to Petersville.

By a deed dated December 14, 1872, Jacob Peters sold to George Levan his half interest about lock No. 1, and above and below the same, which is recorded in Book S, Vol. 10, p. 89, so that George Levan now owned absolutely the upper portion, extending to and below Levan's mill. By a deed of the same date Peters and Levan sold to John Shober all the portions about Petersville, found in Book U, Vol. 11, p. 294. And by a deed found in Book K, Vol, 11, p. 293, George Levan sold his interest in seven acres at Wabank to Jacob M. Frantz; and by certain other deeds George Levan sold to Jacob Peters his half interest in the same about Wabank and Slackwater.

Transportation of Merchandise.

I can not say very much about the merchandise transported by the navigation companies, but in Hazard's Register it is stated that the goods of Langdon C. Cheves, when he moved them from Lancaster, were shipped to Philadelphia by the way of Slackwater Navigation. Among the goods shipped some are referred to in Vol. 3 of Hazard's Register, p. 254, where it is said that "Captain Charles Odel took on board 90 hogsheads of whisky belonging to Mr. John Lutz, on Wednesday, the 17th of March, 1829, and left lock No. 4 (Rock Hill) at five o'clock in the evening and arrived the next day at two o'clock in the morning at Port Deposit. The charges for delivering to Baltimore is one cent a gallon. On the 19th Captain Omit loaded two arks with whisky and flour at lock No. 8 for Baltimore. Two other arks are loaded with whisky of ninety hogshead and will proceed this day. The navigation is in fine order, and that the people ex-

pect to be benefited with an active spring trade and that from the port of Lancaster we can always get to Baltimore two or three weeks earlier than the trade of the west branch of the Susquehanna, owing to the late improvements in navigation."

The article also says that Lancaster rejoices at the prosperity which the navigation brings to the city and county. In the same book it is stated, under date of May 12, 1829, that "yesterday morning as the ark Adam Reigart, was clearing lock No. 9, at the mouth of the Conestoga, part of the wall fell on the ark and hurled it into the river, a complete wreck." On page 336 it is stated that the Governor has appointed Edward Hutchinson to be inspector of liquors at Conestoga Landing, near Lancaster city. In Vol. 6 of Hazard's Register, p. 46, it is stated that the rates of toll on the Conestoga Navigation would be 20 cents a thousand for boards and 34 cents a thousand for staves and 7 cents a thousand for shingles; and that this will mean $9,632 on those articles alone. In Vol. 3 of Hazard's Register, p. 32, it is stated that a boat load of wood and locust posts from the Susquehanna has ascended the Conestoga to Lancaster. A high encomium on the enterprise of building the Conestoga Navigation is found in Vol. 3 of Hazard's Register, p. 42, in which the blessings of the system are elaborated upon.

Lancastrians Bought Stock.

The Conestoga Navigation Company, as we have just shown, was incorporated by an Act passed March 3, 1825. The object was to make the Conestoga creek, or river, navigable for all the ascending or descending trade by steamboat, reel boats, rafts

and arks. Twelve hundred shares of stock, at $50 per share, making $60,000, was fixed by law as the capital stock of the company, with privilege to increase the stock, if necessary, for completing the work. Before the fourth of June the commissioners had secured subscriptions from 167 persons, chiefly from residents of Lancaster, for 811 shares, and on that day the charter was granted.

The company was organized on the sixth of July following, when these officers were elected: Adam Reigart, Edward Coleman, George B. Porter, Jasper Slaymaker, George Louis Mayer, Hugh Maxwell, John F. Steinman, of Lancaster city, and John Lintner and George Haverstick, of Lancaster township. Engineers were employed to examine the Conestoga, surveys made and the plan of work adopted. It was to be an entire Slackwater navigation. The work of the whole line was let to Caleb Hammill, a contractor of New York, he being the lowest bidder. He was recommended by Governor Clinton and Judge Wright, distinguished men of the State. On the seventh of December, 1825, a contract was signed by Hammill, by which he was bound to make the navigation for the sum of $53,240, and to deliver the work completed by the fourth of July, 1827.

Edward F. Gray, a pupil of Canvas White, was appointed engineer of the company. Nine dams and locks were to be erected on the river, No. 1 at Light's mill, and descending to No. 9 at the mouth of the Conestoga. On July 31, 1826, the first dam and lock were finished. On the second of August the board of managers, on the invitation of Mr. Hammill, the contractor, going aboard the new boat, "Edward Coleman," proceeded at

the rate of about five miles an hour to the new lock. There was a band of music on the boat playing national airs. Upon reaching the dock they found a committee of ladies from Lancaster, with Judge Moulton C. Rogers and Dr. Samuel Humes. Upon reaching the lock, Mrs. William Jenkins made an address on behalf of the ladies, complimenting Mr. Hammill upon his success in the work so far, and stating the great advantages it would give to the people of the county. She ended by presenting the contractor with a flag. Mr. Hammill responded in an appropriate speech, and the ladies and their escorts were taken aboard the boat, which proceeded to Mr. Reigart's landing, at the head of navigation, a distance of two and three-quarter miles. Later in the afternoon the boat returned to the bridge, when the party returned to Lancaster.

On the second of January the engineer, Mr. Gray, in his letter to the president and board of managers, reported the entire completion of the work from the landing of Adam Reigart to where the Conestoga empties its waters into the Susquehanna. It was a distance of 17 miles and 71 chains, with a fall of 64 feet, making valuable water power at each of the locks. Early in the progress of the work it was found necessary to increase the strength of the locks, in order to resist the great pressure of the water. For this alteration and all extra work the sum of $6,573 was allowed the contractor, making the cost of the work $59,534. Other bills of expense were added later, bringing the total cost of making the Conestoga navigable to $68,539.92.

Several mills located on the Conestoga were purchased to save trouble

with the owners. These mills were Light's, Haverstick's and Espenshade's, Light's mill was purchased April 4, 1826, which with repairs and twelve acres and 64 perches of land, cost $7,780. Haverstick's mill was purchased June 7, 1827, for $9,680. It included 57 acres of land. Espenshade's mill, on the Little Conestoga, was purchased January 1, 1828, for $3,200. There were nine acres of land with it. The entire cost of the mills was $20,660.

In a report of a committee in reference to the Conestoga Navigation it was stated that it "stands alone in the Union, for there is none like it—a monument of our genius and enterprise."

On the fifth of January, 1829, the following were elected managers: Adam Reigart (president), George B. Porter, Edward Coleman, John Reynolds, Henry Kieffer, Jonas Dorwart, F. R. Muhlenberg, Robert Evans, John R. Montgomery, James Humes, Abraham Gibbons and George Louis Mayer.

Captain John Mitchell built a packet boat to run on the Conestoga. It was 70 feet long and 12 feet beam, with three cabins, one for ladies and one for gentlemen, with dining room, bar, pantries, etc. Similar packet boats were used afterwards on the Pennsylvania canal.

Another pleasure boat was built by Samuel C. Slaymaker. It was 60 feet long and 12 wide. It was drawn by two horses, and was used between Reigart's Landing and the first lock. Samuel C. Slaymaker was one of the proprietors of the stage line between Lancaster and Philadelphia.

It may be interesting to note here that the first packet in Pennsylvania was built in Lancaster in 1828. It was named the "Red Rover," and was

run on the Conestoga Navigation between Lancaster and Safe Harbor, until 1833 (Book of the Pageant in Philadelphia, p. 33).

The Conestoga Navigation Company brought slate from Peach Bottom for George M. Steinman & Co., this firm having a slate yard at Graeff's Landing, opposite Engleside. At that time Jacob and Frederick Sener were dealers in coal and lumber at the same place.

The importance of this early waterway is shown by the following, taken from an opinion given by the committee appointed in 1832 to examine into the advisability of continuing the canal, as may be seen in Vol. 10 of Hazard's Register, p. 58:

"Lumber and coal business has increased for the last two years to an amazing extent, and it must increase every succeeding year. Coal received by the Conestoga Navigation Company sold at Lancaster from $.50 to $.75 a ton cheaper than at Columbia or Marietta, charging land carriage to Lancaster; and boards and shingles from $.50 to $.75 per one thousand feet less."

The two posters on which this article was based were presented to the society by Mrs. Laura B. Ehler. They give rates for merchandise from Lancaster to Philadelphia and Baltimore, and regulations for boats, etc. The date of one poster is March 15, 1848, and of the other March, 1853.

The notes or data for this article were taken mainly from Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania, 1833, Vol. 10, p. 54; from Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County, p. 317, and records in the Recorder's office.

Minutes of November Meeting

Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 13, 1908.

There was a rather spirited meeting of the Lancaster County Historical Society held this evening in the society's rooms in the A. Herr Smith Library Building. A paper was read on early Conestoga navigation, which provoked some discussion, and some new light was thrown on the early life of President James Buchanan. President Steinman presided, and there was a fairly large attendance of members. November 6 was the regular meeting night of the society, but owing to the gathering here of the Pennsylvania-German Society it was postponed until to-night.

Miss Edith L. Baldwin, of Cains, Lancaster county, was elected a member.

The Librarian, Samuel M. Sener, announced the following donations to the society since the October meeting:

Volumes 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Franklin Calendar of Letters and Papers from the American Philosophical Society; Biographical Sketch of Christian Herr, from L. B. Herr; Boyd's Lancaster City Directory for 1857, from W. B. Altick; Letters from Tuskegee. from Dr. S. Becker Von Grabill; Kansas State Historical Collections, Volume 10, from the Kansas State Historical Society; Bulletins of the Bureau of Ethnology, New York Public Library; Pennsylvania State Dairy Commission; Grand Rapids Public Library and Carnegie Library; Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography for July, 1908; Historical Address

of the Delaware Historical Society; Annals of Iowa for October, 1908; Pennsylvania-German Magazine for November, 1908; Sketch of Schaefferstown. Pa., from Rev. J. W. Richards, the author; Certificate of Stock (cancelled) of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, dated March 16, 1795, from Hon. W. U. Hensel; two local postal cards, from D. B. Landis; two Conestoga navigation posters, from Mrs. L. B. Ehler, of Los Angeles, California.

The thanks of the society were extended to the donors.

The paper prepared for the evening was submitted by Miss Martha B. Clark, who had as her subject "The Conestoga Navigation Company." It told of an early attempt to make the Conestoga navigable from the Susquehanna to the "port of Lancaster." The company was created under an Act of the Legislature in 1825, and it constructed dams and locks from Safe Harbor to Reigart's Landing. Boats were operated for a number of years, but the venture was never a very profitable one, and the company's property was subsequently disposed of at Sheriff's sale.

Miss Clark's paper was supplemented by some data, prepared by H. Frank Eshleman, Esq., on a still earlier venture to make the Conestoga navigable. It recited at length the proceedings which led up to the organization of the later Conestoga Navigation Company.

Both papers were referred to the Executive Committee for further action.

Mr. W. U. Hensel then entertained the members by reading extracts from private correspondence which threw some new light on an early love affair of Lancaster county's only President, James Buchanan. In an article

published in Volume 10 of the proceedings of the society a supposed "Buchanan myth," to the effect that Buchanan had at one time commenced the practice of law in Kentucky, was "exploded" by Mr. Hensel. Quite recently, however, he was shown some correspondence which appears to establish beyond a doubt that President Buchanan did journey to Kentucky to take up the study of law, and that he met there a lady with whom he became greatly smitten. Portions of the correspondence were read by Mr. Hensel, and they proved most entertaining, besides throwing much new light on Buchanan's early career.

An interesting discussion of the letters followed, and the society then adjourned.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee the article prepared by Miss Clark and the data on the same subject submitted by H. Frank Eshleman, Esq., were ordered to be printed in the Society's pamphlet.